

**REGULAR MEETING
DECEMBER 16, 2013**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Monday, December 16, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

Present: Councilors Hemmann, Hurley, Kotkin, Manousos, Martino, Rell, Roberts, Deputy Mayor Barry and Chairperson Montinieri

Also present: Chandler Rose, Assessor; Richard Bailey, Fire Chief; Mike Turner, Town Engineer; Jeff Bridges, Town Manager and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Councilor Manousos led the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Mayor Montinieri asked Assessor Chandler Rose for a brief summary of the revaluation process.

Chandler Rose provided an update on the current town revaluation project. He explained new property assessment notices were mailed last Friday [December 13, 2013] to property owners. The assessment notices provide the new assessment with last year's for comparison. The notices also contained contact information if a property owner would like to discuss a meeting to discuss their property assessment with Vision Government Solutions, they were the vendor contracted to assist us with the revaluation. The notices also include information regarding the website of the assessment data for the entire town and a link to that website is also available through the Town of Wethersfield's website. The notices also have information if a property owner would like to seek an appeal with the Board of Assessment of Appeals. The next step in this project is the informal property hearings, held with representatives from Vision Government Solutions, will be starting at the end of this week at the Community Center. There are evening appointments available. Hearings are scheduled to conclude the last week of January. Meeting dates and times are on the town website along with additional information. He explained once the formal hearings are concluded Vision will send out the final assessment notices. Right now they are preliminary and are subject to change. The grand list is scheduled to be filed on January 31st. If a property owner is seeking an appeal with the Board of Assessment Appeals, they must file an application no later than February 20th. That is noted on this assessment notice. Appeal applications along with the Board of Assessment schedule for the March meetings can be found on the town's website and also in the Assessor's office. The Board of Assessment Appeals will conclude their meetings at the end of March. He will be able to provide the final grand list figures after the Board of Assessment Appeal changes. He anticipates giving it to the Finance Department in early April. The final grand list with all of the changes and the property tax bills reflecting the new assessments will be mailed out July 14th. Mr. Rose stated that he doesn't anticipate any snags or delays with the schedule.

Mayor Montinieri asked if Mr. Rose could just give whatever information he is comfortable in sharing from a broad point of view. Mr. Montinieri commented this revaluation is roughly 5 years from the last revaluation. Mr. Rose responded that is correct.

Mayor Montinieri asked is it fair to point out we obviously have gone through a significant recession since the last revaluation so we can assume some of the values on homes particularly have been impacted by it. Mayor Montinieri asked if he can give a little bit of an overview of what that looks like and how we might compare now with other towns in greater Hartford.

Mr. Rose responded as Mayor Montinieri stated, the last revaluation in Wethersfield was done in 2008. He explained the difference between this revaluation and the one done in 2008, 2008's consisted of having an inspection of everyone's property. Everyone was visited by a data collector and an interior inspection was attempted. This revaluation was done based on running statistical analysis of where the real estate market is today in 2013. He stated we did do inspections: we inspected any building permits that were done, sales inspections or anyone that requested an inspection. Mr. Rose after all of that analysis, we took it and compared it to what the real estate is transferring for today. Then he looked at how many sales over the past two years that were qualified transactions. We had approximately 472 transfers we were able to look at, which is a good number, and it's going to give you a real good idea of where we are now. So to answer your questions specifically, yes, we did see an overall decline in the residential real estate market. He doesn't know the exact number as of yet because we are still in the preliminary phase and everything is subject to change. Mr. Rose stated \with the overall first pass, we did see that.

Mayor Montinieri asked about the commercial side.

Mr. Rose responded the commercial side was also done. They used a lot of the commercial property owners' income and expense statements. They are required by statute to file that with the town so we take a look at a lot of that for our analysis of the commercial properties and again based on the preliminary numbers that we have seen prior to the hearings, we have seen an increase overall in the commercial properties and again, it is subject to change.

Mayor Montinieri asked if any Councilors had any questions.

Councilor Martino asked if he knows what generated the increase on the commercial side.

Mr. Rose responded that it was a combination of a few things. Some of it was due to building permits, new construction of commercial properties which we've seen; certainly it also did have an affect looking at rents. We analyzed that as well and we did see that some of the rental commercial properties we are seeing it bounce back. Mr. Rose stated that we also looked at that with apartments. The apartment market is rather strong so it is going to have an impact as well. They looked at the retail end of it as well which is also showing signs of a bounce back.

Councilor Kotkin asked when you go through the schedule, if somebody is away I think the informal meeting ended like the 3rd of January, if they needed information but they are away for the holidays, could you accommodate them before the cut-off for the grand list.

Mr. Rose responded absolutely, we have accounted for that. He explained that looking at the calendar and seeing the holidays we did note that and we currently have some extra dates set aside at the community center so that if we do see that number start to increase for people who can't make it in by the 3rd, I will also do hearings with property owners. He stated that we did all of the inspections in-house for this revaluation. All of the inspections were done by himself or someone in the Assessor's office, so if someone does contact us, we will go out and reinspect the property if they request it, so yes, we will set aside some extra time.

Councilor Kotkin, with regards to residential, if somebody saw an increase, would it be mostly because they have done some improvement to that dwelling or could it be their neighborhood is viewed as more attractive or is it pretty much because they have done work on that house.

Mr. Rose responded that obviously, it's a case-by-case situation right now, but he would say that one of the drivers that would increase a person's property value is new construction or any improvements they did. He stated that if there was an error on the prior assessment that would cause an adjustment for this year's assessment, obviously that's going to factor in. Mr. Rose stated that most of the residential properties had one of those types of occurrences, but again we look at them on a case-by-case specific property.

Councilor Kotkin asked so whether you are going up, down, or sideways, everybody's getting a letter and asked if they all went out Friday.

Mr. Rose responded yes, he is mandated by state statutes to notify property owners of their new assessment and every single property owner received it. He asked if you did not receive one; certainly reach out to the Assessor's office. They will find out the reason why you didn't receive it. They have copies of all of them in their office and can easily reproduce it.

Mayor Montinieri asked if he has any sense of how we are doing as compared to other neighboring towns with respect to assessments and do you see any patterns.

Mr. Rose responded that, comparatively speaking, based on our preliminary analysis and then looking at other municipalities that have recently sent out their notices having done revaluations for 2013, in most instances, we are looking at figures that have higher values than surrounding communities.

Mayor Montinieri asked that would suggest that Wethersfield is doing a little bit better than some of our neighboring communities with respect to the recession for home values.

Mr. Rose responded without knowing the other town's situations, based on what he can see and what the other towns have shared, yes, he would say that.

Mayor Montinieri thanked him for all of the information. He thinks residents will have some questions for his office once they have received their specific assessments. It's going to have some impact on our mill rate as we look at what happens as we go through the budget process in

the spring. Mayor Montinieri commented it has obviously been done in a very efficient fashion. There will be residents who want to come out and take advantage of discussing the findings on their specific properties and, of course, we welcome the public to do that. Mayor Montinieri commented that hopefully the overall perspective given the recession is positive and people will be able to digest the information and get follow-up with the assessor.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Jim Clynych, 903 Ridge Rd., commented that there are no convenient times to meet with the Board of Appeals and that he will need to take a half day. Mayor Montinieri urged him to reach out to the Assessor about the schedule because it sounds like there is some flexibility to take a look at some options in light of your schedule.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd., feels the values of our properties are going down and it's because the way Wethersfield operates. He thinks putting taxes down will raise the values of our properties not the other way around. Mr. Young blames it on the mismanagement and over taxation of this town. Mr. Young spoke of a Hartford Courant article regarding the performance of Wethersfield's schools and stated that our scores have just been level over the years and that the surrounding towns' scores are now higher than ours.

Lee Sekas, 117 Wells Rd., commented that some of the curb cuts in Town need to be better cleared of snow. He also commented that it is good that some local businesses are working with the Town to make themselves more handicaps accessible. He urged the Town to issue fines to people who violate the handicap parking and snow removal rules.

George A. Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, commented his house value went down a little bit as well. He commented on the low voter turnout, stating low voter turnout does not make for good government. Mr. Ruhe stated that the Council should reach out to the community for ideas. He hopes the Council has gotten some new blood in the membership that will working on the Charter. Also, big items should go out to referendum.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilor Kotkin commented the Library Board met and the Friends of the Library book sale raised almost \$8,000.00 and is almost double what they normally raise. He stated last year, the Friends of the Library, donated about \$18,000 to the Library. There are 245 members (he is one) and they do a good job. He urged folks who are committed to the Library and others to join the group.

Councilor Kotkin commented that the Library now has a student monitor. Past issues of disruptive kids has now been taken care of and is being adequately addressed especially for folks who use the library frequently in the afternoons.

Councilor Kotkin commented he had a meeting this evening of the Budget and Finance Committee. He reported they received the town's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2013. Bottom line, the Town is in good shape and our unrestricted fund balance is 10% of general fund expenditures. It is at the high end of the range the Town has set for fiscal policy. As we begin issuing bonds for the high school renovation, we do have more financial flexibility. We received the initial assessment. We will be meeting with the auditor and the Budget and Finance Committee will be meeting on the 21st of January and that is an annual meeting.

Councilor Kotkin stated the Charter requires us to go through a request for proposals for town attorneys. We've begun that process and received five proposals. Interviews will be sometime in the first half of January.

Councilor Kotkin commented that their Budget and Finance Committee is going to get together with the Board of Education's Finance Committee as early as we can in the budget process which probably means some time before the end of January because the board needs to have the budget done by the middle of March and sent over to us.

Councilor Martino attended EDIC on December 6. They are looking for another intern to work on updating their web site. ~~He also had attended the Salute to Business on the 12th as did~~ *There was a Salute to Business meeting on the 12th attended by Councilors Rell and Roberts and the Mayor.* There were many long-term businesses honored as well as some individuals.

Councilor Roberts commented that Shared Services met on December 4th and the Shared Services Committee consists of herself, Donna Hemmann, Tony Martino, Gina DeAngelo, Polly Moon, Elaine Steinmiller-Paradise, John Cascio and Jeff Kotkin. They met for 1½ hours to establish goals and objectives of the committee. They already have some collaboration which goes on both sides in terms of shared health plans, shared pension plans, property liability insurance, property and grounds, etc., but the public isn't really aware of that. so we are going to try and publicize that more and will provide information on to the public. She stated that the Committee would like to see some real consolidation in the area of IT for equipment and staffing at some level. The next meeting is January 7.

Councilor Roberts commented that she also attended the Public Safety meeting on December 11 where they discussed awarding the bid on the fire truck. She commented that going forward they want to take a more in-depth look at the security issues and the Director of Security position with the Board of Education.

Mayor Montinieri commented that he attended the fire departments longevity dinner last week; he attended a CT Commission on Municipalities which reviewed several legislative impacts on municipalities which are happening throughout the state as well as taking a look at financing alternatives for bonding and roadwork.

Mayor Montinieri commented that Chief Cetran invited him to attend the police and public safety dinner to hear the latest legislative actions impacting police and public safety.

Mayor Montinieri commented that they had a good turnout for the EDIC dinner.

Mayor Montinieri commented that on January 30, from 8 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. there will be an event that will combine the state of the Town with a new business growth initiative that's going to be sponsored and supported by the Department of Economic and Community Development. He stated that we are going to begin marking that through EDIC and the Chamber very quickly and the idea will be to get some information out to our local businesses. He explained that the Economic and Community Development Department is going to be providing information for specific businesses that will attend about available options to support their growth, their redevelopment, financing, improvements in their building as well as marketing. Mayor Montinieri commented that there are significant resources available in the State and this is directed specifically at stimulating current businesses that serve our community.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Bridges stated that at the last meeting he was asked about the amount of signage on the Pawn Shop covering the windows. It was over the amount provided in the zoning regulations. They did take some of it down to be in compliance. The color is still the same.

COUNCIL ACTION

Deputy Mayor Barry moved **"TO APPOINT THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS TO THE CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION FOR A TERM BEGINNING DECEMBER 16, 2013 FOR NO MORE THAN 16 MONTHS"**, seconded by Councilor Kotkin.

T. William Knapp	U	171 Collier Road
John J. McAuliffe, Jr.	R	149 Boulter Road
Steven A. Kirsche	R	11 Golf Road
Mary R. Pelletier	R	61 State Street
Dan A. Silver	D	10 Orchard Brook Drive
Louis Laccavole	D	247 Ridge Road
Mike Zaleski	D	23 Black Birch Road

Mayor Montinieri commented that he appreciates the work ahead and it is a very important task and thinks this group is very well skilled and qualified to do the task and looks forward to their efforts.

Councilor Hemmann thanked the people who put their name into consideration and stated that there were many years of experience within the town and the resumes were quite impressive and it was a difficult decision to make.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Deputy Mayor Barry moved **“TO APPOINT DAMIEN CREGEAU, 493 MAIN STREET AS AN ALTERNATE TO THE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION FOR THE TERM DECEMBER 16, 2013 TO JUNE 30, 2016”**, seconded by Councilor Roberts.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

None.

BIDS

Councilor Roberts moved to **“AWARD A BID TO SUTPHEN CORPORATION FOR THE PURCHASE OF A 2014 SL 75 FIRE TRUCK FOR \$766,245.94”**, seconded by Councilor Hemmann.

Mr. Bridges explained that we went out to bid for the new truck to replace the 1981 truck at Company 2. Chief Bailey is here this evening to answer any questions. He stated that it is within budget and stated that we estimated about \$800,000 and it came in under. He stated that we had two really good bids and Sutphen was the lower bidder that met the specifications to the most detail. Mr. Bridges recommends purchasing the truck. He stated that we are still waiting for the firefights assistance grant but it is going to take about a year to get the truck built and we do have the down payment in cash.

Mayor Montinieri asked Councilor Roberts to share some of the behind-the-scenes work that was done with respect to the building that this is going to be housed as well as weight restrictions.

Councilor Roberts explained that Sutphen met the bid specifications as well as the engineering report on the capacity of the fire station floor to handle the weight which has been an issue at Company 2 for a while. She explained that the truck will be serving areas where the 100 ft. ladder trucks can operate such as cul de sacs and properties with long driveways or properties with narrow access and stated that this will also be the second out truck to structure fires to help us with our ISO standards. Councilor Roberts explained that the truck will be produced in Maine but there was a possibility of some service work in Cromwell but the main areas if we needed major work would be either in Greenfield, MA or upstate Maine and this will allow all the drivers in town to be trained on the same type of vehicle.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Martino moved to **“APPROVE A PURCHASE ORDER WITH GENERAL**

PAVING & CONSTRUCTION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$276,149.25 FOR THE PAVING MAINTENANCE PROGRAM”, seconded by Councilor Kotkin.

Councilor Rell asked if this is limited to just these roads or if it could be opened in the future to other roads if there is additional funding or pavement left over.

Town Manager Bridges responded this is for the spring paving; there will be more for fall and next spring and there are mechanisms to do that.

Mayor Montinieri said there is a master list prepared for every road in Town.

Manager Bridges responded that there is always more need than money and prioritizing is always tough because we just have tremendous need.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS, APPOINTMENTS FOR INTRODUCTION

None.

MINUTES

Deputy Mayor Barry moved **“TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 2, 2013 WITH CHANGES”** seconded by Councilor Hemmann. {On page 1, Berry to Barry}.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Kotkin moved **“TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 2, 2013”**, seconded by Councilor Martino. {On Page 6, change Wagoner to Wagner}.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Executive session was cancelled.

Public Comments

Gus Colantonio, 16 Morrison Ave., spoke again about the lack of stop sign on Morrison and stated that he would continue to address this issue.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd., was glad to hear we were in good financial shape. He felt it was about time the Shared Services met but he did want to see the Finance Departments under one roof as well as IT and Purchasing under one roof. Mr. Young spoke about the Board of

Education's performance.

Mr. Rose provided evaluation insight. He's the same man who signed and sealed the Wilkus Farm property at \$350,000 and then the Town sold it for less. He said it was the first time he heard mention of revaluation in Wethersfield.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, said with the great news of the Town's finances they should just buy the stop sign for Gus. Manager Bridges stated it is against the law, that's why.

Mr. Ruhe stated the last Charter Revision Commission met in a small room. They need to seek as much information as possible for such an important document.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Montinieri wished everyone safe holiday travel.

At 8:10 p.m., Councilor Roberts moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**", seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved by Vote of Council
January 6, 2014

See change on page 5, paragraph 5, striking out "~~He also had attended the Salute to Business on the 12th as did~~" and replacing it with "*There was a Salute to Business meeting on the 12th attended by*".